

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 08144 071343Z

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 L-03 H-03 EB-11

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1355

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC

SUBJECT: ARREST OF US NATIONALS

REF: STATE 198956

1. EMBOFF MET WITH HOFFMAN AND LONDON MANAGER OF ZAPATA, SAMUEL D DENNY, LATE AFTERNOON 6 OCTOBER, AFTER CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY REACHING HOFFMAN, WHO NOW STAYING IN FEDERAL PALACE HOTEL (TELEPHONE 26691, ROOM 323). ACCORDING TO HOFFMAN, ZAPATA OFF-SHORE EMPLOYEE, FOR REASONS STILL UNCLEAR, HAS TURNED OVER TO NIGERIAN C.I.D. BONAFIDE EVIDENCE OF TECHNICAL VISA VIOLATIONS BY COMPANY RELATING TO WORK PERMITS. POLICE HAVE HAD CREWS OF TWO ZAPATA OFF-SHORE RIGS BROUGHT TO WARRI FOR COURT HEARING SCHEDULED FOR 6 OCTOBER. SKELETON CREW OF 2-3 MEN LEFT ON EACH RIG. LAWYER DISPATCHED BY HOFFMAN AND DENNY TO BE PRESENT AT HEARING, BUT NO WORD OF RESULTS, IF ANY, AT TIME OF THIS WRITING.

2. HOFFMAN MAINTAINS THAT COMPANY HAS NOT EXCEEDED TOTAL NUMBER OF EXPATRIATE QUOTAS, BUT CONCEDES THAT NOT ALL MEN ON RIGS HAVE WORK PERMITS IN THEIR OWN NAMES. COMPANY MUST MAINTAIN CERTAIN NUMBER OF MEN ON EACH RIG AND CONNOT WAIT REQUISITE THREE MONTHS FOR APPROVAL OF NEW WORK PERMIT BEFORE REPLACING WORKER WHO QUILTS ON SHORT NOTICE. OF APPROXIMATELY 50 MEN ON TWO RIGS, 8-11 DO NOT

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PAGE 02 LAGOS 08144 071343Z

PRESENTLY HAVE WORK PERMITS, THOUGH THEY ARE WITHIN

AUTHORIZED EXPAT PERMIT AUTHORIZATION AND PAPERS ARE IN
MILL FOR APPROVAL.

3. ZAPATA MAINLY CONCERNED TO GET RIGS REMANDED, AS
COMPANY LOSING MONEY EACH DAY THEY SHUT DOWN. THEY DO
NOT DENY TECHNICAL VIOLATION OF VISA/WORK PERMIT REGULATIONS,
BUT HOPE AVOID DEPORTATION OF INDIVIDUAL VIOLATORS.
ALTHOUGH C.I.D. PROMISED RETURN OF PASSPORTS OCTOBER 5 TO
THOSE EMPLOYEES NOT IN VIOLATION OF VISAS, PASSPORTS NOT
RETURNED YET, NOR MEN ALLOWED RETURN TO RIGS.

4. NO QUESTION OF "SERIOUS INTIMIDATION," THOUGH
APPEARS NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN GOING THROUGH
COMPANY FILES, FINGERPRINTING STAFF, ETC., MORE THAN
NORMAL IN SUCH CASES. THIS IS LIKELY RESULT OF FACT
THAT C.I.D. HANDLING CASE RATHER THAN IMMIGRATION
AUTNORITIES. HOFFMAN AND DENNY BELIEVE EXPLANATION FOR
THIS DEVIATION FROM NORMAL PROCEDURE IS THAT ZAPATA
EMPLOYEE HAS STRONG CONNECTIONS IN C.I.D.
HOFFMAN DID NOT HAVE NAMES OF SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS WHO
TO BE "TRIED" FOR VISA VIOLATIONS.

5. IN ADDITION TO COMPLAINT OF VISA VIOLATIONS, SOME
MENTION MADE OF POSSIBLE DELINQUENT BACK-TAXES AND
OF SLURS ON NIGERIA IN COMPANY CORRESPONDENCE. AT THIS
POINT NO FORMAL CHARGES HAVE BEEN LODGED AGAINST COMPANY.
LAWYER FRED EGBE IN NIGERIA, REPRESENTING ZAPATA; HE HAS
DISCUSSED WITH INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE, ALHAJI KAM
SALEM, AND WITH CHIEF OF SPECIAL BRANCH, M.D. YUSUFU.
YUSUFU SAID CASE HAS GONE TOO FAR FOR INFORMAL OUT-OF-COURT
SETTLEMENT.

6. HOFFMAN AND DENNY SIAD THEY WOULD WELCOME
DISCREET PRESSURE BY EMBASSY, IF IT COULD BE EFFECTIVE.
HOWEVER, REQUEST WAS VERY LOW-KEY, WITH FULL RECOGNITION
THAT SUCH INTERVENTION BY EMBASSY COULD BE DETRIMENTAL
RATHER THAN BENEFICIAL. BOTH ACCEPTED WITHOUT RESENTMENT
STATEMENT BY EMBOFF THAT IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE AS
WELL AS RISKY FOR EMBASSY TO TRY TO BRING ANY PRESSURE
TO BEAR. EMBOFF SAID THAT, AT MOST, EMBASSY MIGHT
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PAGE 03 LAGOS 08144 071343Z

REQUEST TO BE ADVISED OF STATUS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
CASE. HOFFMAN GIVEN NAME OF EMBASSY CONSUL DAWSON WITH
ADVICE THAT EMBASSY HELP COULD BE GIVEN ONLY IF NIGERIANS
CLEARLY ACTING ILLEGALLY.

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